



# Fluid

*Lip-sync (detail)*,  
2023.  
Steel, paint, and  
Jesmonite,  
395 x 220 x 156 cm.



Q/A



# Circulation.

A Conversation with Holly Hendry

by Elizabeth Fullerton





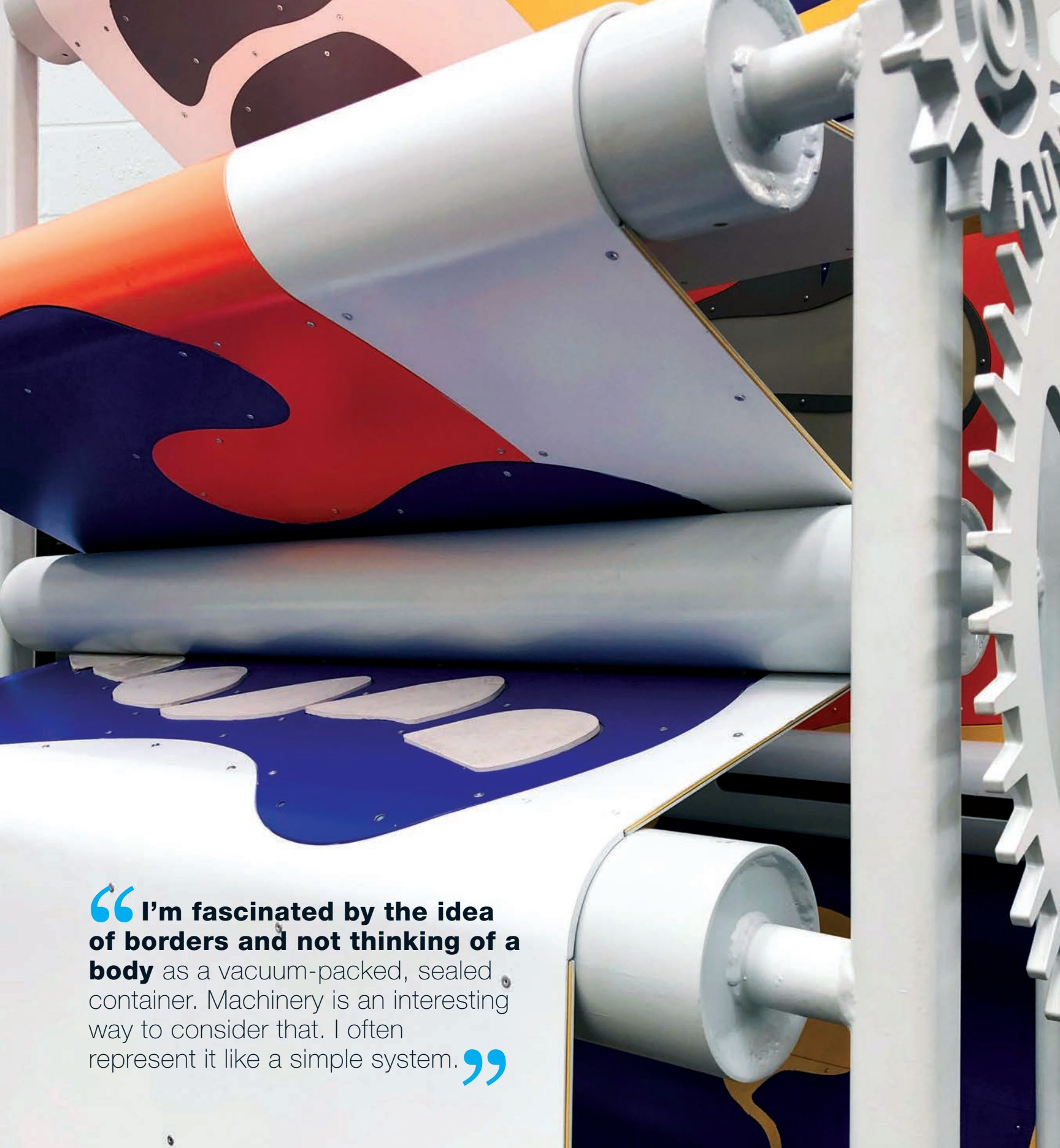
**Systems, patterns, strata**, bodies, and machines are among the preoccupations of British sculptor Holly Hendry. Turning things inside out and breaking their inner workings down into individual, often corporeal, parts, she reveals boundaries that are often more porous and permeable than we might imagine. Her inspirations range from oozing waves of lime-green candy photographed in a Colombian sweet factory and images of Saint Lucy's disembodied eyes on a plate to a mosaic of food detritus from the Vatican's Profane Museum and an illustration of the human anatomy as an industrial process by the 20th-century gynecologist Fritz Kahn.

Hendry recently installed her first permanent public artwork, *Lip-sync* (2023), at Birmingham City University, outside a former rubber and bicycle factory, now converted into a center for technological innova-

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tion. Resembling a gigantic vertical conveyor belt, imprinted with bodily forms and orifices, the vibrant steel sculpture references ideas of labor, community, the body as machine, and machine as body. *Slackwater* (2023), another outdoor sculpture, recently opened on the rooftop garden above Temple Underground station in London, beside the River Thames. Inspired by the rhythms of fluvial tides and the flow of people, it creates a tapestry of interwoven buoys and undulating pipes in which visitors temporarily become part of the flotsam and jetsam gathered by the water before spilling back out into their busy lives.

**Elizabeth Fullerton:** [What inspired \*Lip-sync\*? There seems to be a formal connection with \*Slacker\* \(2019\), a kinetic sculpture that you made for your Yorkshire Sculpture Park show "The Dump is Full](#)



“ I’m fascinated by the idea of borders and not thinking of a body as a vacuum-packed, sealed container. Machinery is an interesting way to consider that. I often represent it like a simple system. ”



of Images.” That work also featured a monumental conveyor belt, a silicone band inlaid with bodily images and crushed objects from your studio.

**HH:** *Slacker* was about 150 feet long, and I was pouring parts, mixing parts, chopping it, and making a sort of rubber tapestry. Because it was done in my studio, I fashioned a dodgy roller system—I’d do a bit, peel it off, then put it around the wooden rollers and do the next bit. It became a giant Exquisite Corpse. I really like incorporating the making into the thinking, which happens a lot in my work, and that became the starting point for *Lip-sync*. I was thinking about the relationship between the body, the machine, and digitization. The Jacquard loom became involved because it was the first form of computer, the holes being a form of coding, but also something material, tangible. Much of the time, women were coding the information and processing it. I was really interested in the human and the hand within the computer.

**EF:** You also employed the Surrealists’ Exquisite Corpse technique in making *Lip-sync*.

**HH:** I didn’t want it to be just my voice, so I did workshops with local school kids and students from Birmingham City University, asking: What is a body? Where do we see its limits? How do we relate that to extremes of our body extended and expanded? Each group did drawings and folded them over as a warm up. Then we had long lengths of fabric that they could cut holes into and draw on and wear. We activated it as a group. This resulted in masses of drawings compressed together to make a weird, fictional, assemblage-type of anatomy. I hope the work looks like it’s unraveling from the ground. It’s like part of the building’s inner workings, but also a glimpse of people’s impersonations of bodies and technologies.

**EF:** This is your first permanent public work. Was the process different?

**HH:** For the complex welding, bending, and spraying, I worked with the Whitewall Company; it felt strange not to do the majority of the work myself. Usually I work into something and cut away or add bits, but I couldn’t do that here, which was hard for me. I made small cast elements though, using water-jet or laser-cut molds. I would take pictures of hand-drawn elements and load them onto the computer; digital

software then simplified and rationalized everything before sending it to be physically cut out, so the digital technologies became another collaborator in the process. That was nice because the process of fossilizing a quick moment in steel involved both hands and computers.

**EF:** So, the structure is made from rolled and laser-cut steel, with the organic forms cut out, hand-cast, and inlaid in the whole?

**HH:** Yes, from far away, it looks like a single image; but up close, you see that it’s a puzzle of individual sections bolted together. It’s only about six millimeters thick. I wanted to make the metalwork feel malleable and fluid, to have a playfulness, so some parts are powder-coated with a shine and others matte. There are elements cast in jesmonite mixed with aggregate, which feel more stony. And then there are holes based on the early Jacquard loom holes, but they’re the holes that we made in the workshops and put our arms or legs through, so they’re remnants of those actions and drawings. It probably seems like a bonkers impression of a body, but those workshops were among the most important parts of the project for me.

**EF:** Could you elaborate on the relationship between body and machine that runs through your work?

**HH:** I’m interested in the collision of body and machine because it’s a way to talk about the complexities we experience as bodies: Where does my fingertip stop and my phone screen begin? We’ve got microplastics in us, and our DNA is everywhere—I’m fascinated by the idea of borders and not thinking of a body as a vacuum-packed, sealed container. Machinery is an interesting way to consider that. I often represent it like a simple system, which is a good starting point to represent things that are going wrong, or aren’t contained in the way we’d expect them to be. I’m interested in fakeness, realness, and moments when you can talk about the body through mechanical actions.

**EF:** You’ve sliced into the pedestal of *Lip-sync*, creating the impression that the “material” goes into the ground and out again. Where does this fascination with what’s under the surface come from?

**HH:** It’s thinking about the story beyond what you’re



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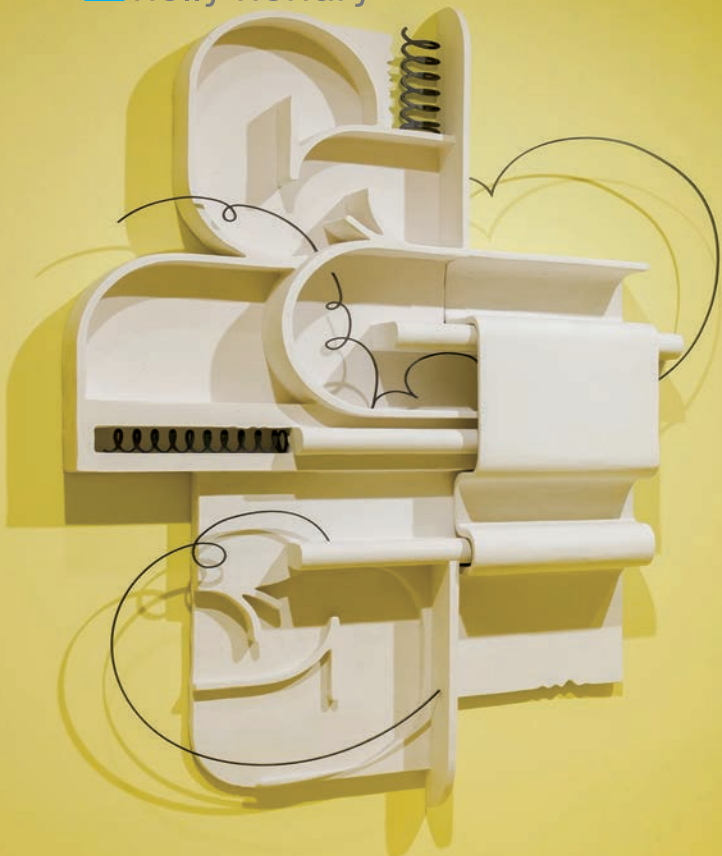




Holly Henry  
The Dump is full of images

**Slacker,**  
2019.  
Steel, aluminum, motor,  
Perspex, Jesmonite,  
silicone, fabric, recycled  
plastics, and aggregate,  
300 x 870 x 255 cm.





seeing, the deeper implications. I get frustrated with an existence that feels very much on the surface. The peeling back of stuff feels like a way to tap into something honest. That honesty comes in the way that my work sometimes reveals itself in terms of how it's made. Yet even when it's revealing its innards, there are still questions about how they are constructed. My work is a constant grappling with which layer to peel back or how far to go.

**EF:** Your studio wall gives some indication of your thought processes and inspirations. I particularly love the images of medieval relics.

**HH:** I always go back to relics and reliquaries, the idea of containment and the grisly display of holy body parts. I want to look at the truth in material, even if it's mostly a fake bone representing the body of a saint. That veneration of matter is interesting. I have a reproduction of Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*; sticking the finger in the wound is like a

moment of touch and death, inside and outside, of matter and belief or non-belief. His finger is preserved as a relic in a church in Rome. Relics are the ultimate bodily dispersal, with parts strewn across religious sites. Then, there's the moment of interacting with them, touching the reliquary, which is powerful.

**EF:** Against this is the cartoonishness of some of your images. What is the appeal of the cartoon aesthetic?

**HH:** I make my materials create the perception of a behavior that exists in the cartoon world of rules—things bouncing back or having a life of their own, going back to a more animistic conception of lively materials and matter. When human bodies are placed next to the inflatable, malleable bounciness of a cartoon, it highlights our fragilities. I'm looking to create a full-bodied sensation, and the cartoon is a way of doing that with simplicity.

The other element is about image and object. My

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT: Detail view of "Holly Hendry: Fatty Acids," Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, 2022.

**Unproducers II, 2021–22.** Plaster, MDF, Jesmonite, concrete, chalk, pigment, and stainless steel, 127 x 66.6 x 57.5 cm.

OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT: Detail view of "Holly Hendry: Fatty Acids," Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, 2022.

**Autopsy-Turvey, 2021.** Plaster, Jesmonite, steel, foam, and wood, 118 x 77 x 12 cm.



THIS PAGE, LEFT, MARK BLOWER, COURTESY STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY / THIS PAGE, RIGHT, MARK BLOWER, © HOLLY HENDRY, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

work is frequently a fight between something flattened and something three dimensional in the world. I'm interested in the idea of material and the impression of material. That's why I use things like rawhide dog chews. We associate dogs with chewing bones, so we soak skin, roll it up, and press it into a mold to look like a bone. For me, that's a cartoon notion of a bone. Cartoons are very good at simplifying something down to its bare bones (no pun intended) and then reinterpreting it through a few simple lines. I try and do that in my work—showing movement, gesture, or workings through the most simple way possible, which is also usually quite complicated. This relates to notions of slapstick, too.

**EF:** *Slackwater*, your installation for the rooftop garden above Temple Underground station, is partly inspired by Victorian cartoons and microscopic images that show the River Thames as a monstrous entity teeming with parasites and strange creatures.

**HH:** The work responds to the site's proximity to the Thames and to the complex network we are part of as a city, ebbing and flowing within currents of water, information, sounds, conversation, stories, and news feeds. I was drawn to the strange calmness of the space and how it travels horizontally beside the river, thinking about moments of stoppage before things start again—something the title references—and how these moments of stoppage often highlight rhythms and systems that carry us along.

I started looking at historic depictions of water—like the cartographer Harold Fisk's maps of the Mississippi River and Leonardo's "Deluge" drawings, where line expresses the liquidity, turbulence, and movement of a material that has no defined edges or articulated parts—thinking about edges and intermingling. This element of edges also connects to the word "temple"—a tool used in weaving to keep edges and structure intact. In anatomy, the temple is found on each side of the head where four skull bones fuse; but it also means a



**“ I make my materials create the perception** of a behavior that exists in the cartoon world of rules—things bouncing back or having a life of their own...a more animistic conception of lively materials and matter. **”**







OPPOSITE: MARK BLOWER, © HOLLY HENDRY, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY / THIS PAGE, LEFT: MARK BLOWER, © HOLLY HENDRY, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY / THIS PAGE, RIGHT: TODD-WHITE ART PHOTOGRAPHY, © HOLLY HENDRY, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

place of worship. Since the site is on top of Temple tube station, these elements all felt very important. I was thinking about water buoys in the same way—as markers of safety and depth and an indication of what is below. I am interested in how these measuring tools speak about limits, depths, and edges; under and over like the movements made to weave.

**EF:** The weaving of the waves conveys the sense of leakage and seepage between human bodies and bodies of water that feminist scholar Astrida Neimanis has written about evocatively. Did those ideas offer inspiration?

**HH:** Astrida Neimanis puts words to things that I didn't think could be verbalized. I am particularly excited about her notions of deep connection between material and bodies—ourselves as singular cells connected and entwined in complex fluid circulations. I think a lot about the space between ourselves and others (materially, physically, socially). This connects to the approaches used in *Slackwater*, weaving the space using diagrammatic lines of tide, sound, and wave movements, and vast sculptural materials like ducting and cable spools usually kept out of sight below ground. I think about the sculpture as a form of physical

drawing within the space and hope that it presents a physical feeling of entanglement, with cast objects and forms caught within the network of lines. The materials are of a scale that enables people to walk or sit among the forms, integrating objects and bodies into the structure and catching chronologies of the city.

**EF:** Your upcoming U.S. project for the SCAD Museum of Art will present another watery conundrum, this time by the Savannah River. What are you planning?

**HH:** I've been following lots of rivers recently. The building has a long brick façade that almost looks like it's falling down at one end, which maintains the original abandoned train station façade within the new architectural intervention of the museum. The four vitrines (the "jewel boxes") attached onto the former railway arches are like containers sitting within public space. I've been thinking about the architecture as a cross-section that spills out onto the streets. The whole space is only about a meter deep, and you access it through a tiny door at each side, so everything has to be modular. I'm interested in working within these confines and the tension between what's outside and what's held

OPPOSITE:

**Sump,**  
2022.  
Steel, stainless steel,  
Baia Blue marble,  
Azul Cielo marble, birch  
plywood, paint, and  
Jesmonite,  
175 x 300 x 85 cm.

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TOP:

**Lingua,**  
2021.  
Steel, paper pulp,  
marble, aluminum,  
plaster, wood, silicone,  
sand, and chalk,  
191.5 x 65 x 240 cm.

**Body Language,**  
2022.  
Jesmonite, pigment, rock,  
steel, and paint,  
103.5 x 77 x 17.5 cm.







THIS PAGE AND  
OPPOSITE:  
**Slackwater,**  
2023.  
Steel ducting, paint,  
wooden cable  
spools, and Jesmonite  
cast fenders,  
6 x 17 x 50 meters.

in the building, between sculpture, shop window, and street, which manifests as public art of sorts.

Savannah, with its history of flooding, has a real relationship with water. There are many factories along the river. I like the idea of the building displaying its insides but also presenting moments of risk, failure, and production. My thinking is that each window will present an industrial water treatment process (with motors that rotate different mechanical and body parts) with links to visual expressions of emotions—some might feel quite compacted materially, like a blockage.

**EF:** Your early diagrams suggest variations on a

**squashed waterwheel crammed into each space.**

**HH:** I'm extending an idea that I used in *Sump* (2022), an outdoor sculpture for a park in Luxembourg, and reflecting on the waterwheel as a mechanism that connects movement, cycles, water, bodies, and industrial processes. The waterwheel was a symbol of progress, using kinetic movement to create energy, but I was also thinking about the Wheel of Fortune and medieval depictions showing people stuck at the bottom or on the top. I made a wheel that had become supple and limp, almost collapsed under the weight of what it was meant to be carrying.

I had never steamed wood before. I had to bend myself



a lot; there were loads of clamps, with glue leaking out. I really liked that relationship with bodies bending and succumbing—flopping my own body onto the structure to hold it in place. I made water droplets representing tears or weight to hang from the wheel—some of them were water jet-cut marble, and I cast others to have a rough or squidgy texture. The middle part of the wheel consisted of CNC-cut wood and metal sandwiched together, so there was a juxtaposition between craft, with the wood-steaming, and tight machine precision based on digital technologies. I was trying to get to a place between potential and vulnerability.

**EF: How will the teardrops relate to the SCAD commission?**

**HH:** The water drops or teardrops visually relate to Savannah's watery connections, but I have been considering the specifics of water in this context. As with many port cities, Savannah had a long history of colonialism and slavery; the bricks of the museum were made by enslaved people, which can't and shouldn't be ignored. The aspect of water as holding painful histories in its material form feels relevant here. I hope to develop the water/teardrop element further. I've been looking at storm glasses used for predicting weather, which have a teardrop shape, but I want them to feel weightier and bulkier.

**EF: Do you make drawings or maquettes for your projects?**

**HH:** Drawing is how I initially get things out in front of me, though I never show any drawings. Many times, they don't make visual sense, but they feel like the best way for me to figure something out. Then, I take it to models and back to drawing. With larger sites, I trust intuition in the space and then draw it on a computer to get an idea of accurate scale, though this feels very different to most of my drawing. I don't ever want to make decisions on the computer because it starts to look like a computer drawing. There's a push and pull between fighting and embracing it. ■■■

*Slackwater remains on view at The Artist's Garden, on the roof of the Temple tube station in London, through September 1, 2024. Hendry's first U.S. solo show opens in February 2024 at the SCAD Museum of Art in Savannah, Georgia.*

